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# WHY ENGLAND SHOULD STOP THE WAR.

BY JEAN DE BLOCH.

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ON what reasonable grounds can England be asked to stop the war, now that its tide has turned in her favor? Would it be wise, or even moral, to leave open a question which might probably cause bloodshed again, and which can now be settled satisfactorily once for all? The present conflict was not of England's seeking. It took her statesmen and generals completely by surprise; and, for several months after the first shot was fired, she sustained a series of checks so serious that many mistook them for disaster. To retire now from the struggle before paralyzing the forces which would fain renew it, would be at once to act contrary to the instinct of self-preservation and to violate the fundamental principles of ethics. Thousands of England's bravest sons have lost their lives on the parched battle-fields of South Africa; scores of thousands have undergone privations and sufferings of a heart-harrowing character; and, while holocausts were being offered up to Moloch, nearly all Europe looked on with positive delight, piously desecrating the finger of a no longer inscrutable Providence in this condign chastisement of "selfish Albion." Now, however, that the Boers are losing ground, England is asked to sheathe her sword and submit the future of her African Empire to the judgment of those very people who gloried in her fancied downfall. The idea is grotesque. But even were it only altruistic, why should England be called upon to take a step which is hurtful to her vital interests—to make a sacrifice from which every other Power would most certainly recoil?

Those are the principal pleas for prosecuting the war to the bitter end which are urged by the Imperialist party in Great Britain; and their arguments are, I frankly admit, capable of being very effectively put. Indeed, so much may be truly and

tellingly said in favor of that view, that I should never dream of entering the lists to uphold the opposite one, were it not that I am so keenly conscious of the vast possibilities of the ethical side of the Anglo-Saxon character, from which have been drawn those wonder-working forces that alone could have built up the greatest Empire of history, the most perfect political fabric known to time and space. And it is to the ethical sentiment, so profound and so widespread among English-speaking peoples, that I chiefly appeal. For therein lies the strength of the race. England's best and most thriving colonies are held together and linked to the mother-country by purely moral ties, not by an army and a fleet. Canada could have seceded yesterday; Australia can separate to-morrow; yet they are to the full as loyal as the men of Kent or Northumberland. What other State has ever held colonies on this tenure? And is it wise to make a new departure and to conquer future colonists with heavy artillery and quick-firing rifles?

Even in matters of foreign policy, England stands on a higher level than any other great world Power, and for this reason much more is expected of her.

The heroic example of an appeal to arbitration under a set of conditions peculiarly galling to national self-love, and of dignified compliance with the terms of an award the details of which appeared to lend themselves to criticism, was first given by Great Britain. The occasion was the tension caused between that country and the United States of America, after the War of Secession, by the "Alabama" question. In that dispute England was assuredly in the wrong, as nations are from time to time. But she frankly owned it, which is more than any other State has ever yet done; and she consented to atone for the harm she had inflicted, which is a still more difficult feat. By this act, she informally inaugurated a system for the peaceful settlement of international disputes, which contains within it the promise of the only millennium attainable by the human race. None of the many and marvellous mechanical inventions which mark the progress of the nineteenth century will prove such a boon to civilization as this self-humiliation of an entire people in the higher interests of the whole world.

Another and much more arduous feat of political morality accomplished by Great Britain was the conclusion of peace with the Boers after the signal victory gained by the latter at Majuba

Hill. Nothing like it is known to history, nor can the heroism underlying the act be easily exaggerated. The English forces had been cut to pieces. The Boers were triumphant and hopeful. Great Britain was ready to wash out the "blot on her 'scutcheon" in the blood of the Boers. Reinforcements were on their way to the Cape. A chance presented itself of treading out the embers of hostility which might once more burst into flame. In a word, every consideration of "honor" and self-interest seemed to call for the carrying on of the war. But the English people, choosing the better part, made peace with the enemy and transformed the struggle into an honorable competition in the domain of civilization. Magnanimity of this kind in foreign politics is seldom gauged aright and is never appreciated; if displayed in war, it is absolutely certain to be misunderstood. The magnanimity which refuses to change defeat into victory must of necessity be mistaken for weakness; and weakness, even when only fancied, is always a political danger and sometimes a material loss. Yet England could afford to neglect all such considerations of worldly wisdom, and she did so after Majuba Hill. This event constitutes the high-water mark of political morality.

But all British civilization tends in the same direction. There may be—*nay*, there must be—back eddies; the present war movement is one of them; but none the less the main current of British civilization is set steadily toward peace. The admirable attitude of Lord Pauncefoot at The Hague Conference is a convincing proof of this. No other Power was more thoroughly in earnest in this matter of turning swords into ploughshares than those of the English tongue; none was willing to go further than England and the United States in the direction of arbitration. The English-speaking peoples, looking all the consequences fully in the face, declared their readiness to do the right thing, come what might; and if the work of the Conference proved ultimately less complete than it might have been, the fault certainly is not theirs. Nor are these conclusions weakened by the present war. It was neither sought for nor foreseen by the British Government; and if the latter circumstance bespeaks a lack of foresight, the former is a proof of good intentions. Belief in the possibility of a pacific settlement prevailed to the last. When the negotiations grew stagnant, some British troops were despatched to the Cape for the purpose of showing the Boers that England was in

earnest, and with the hope of expediting an agreement. The Boers, however, taking time by the forelock, declared war.

And that is by no means all that impartial spectators find to say in explanation of a war which they refuse to justify. When hostilities broke out, few people in or out of England believed very firmly in the wisdom of submitting the issues between the two States to arbitration. England's relations to the Transvaal Republic (with the Orange Free State she had had no quarrel) were from an international point of view extremely vague. The lay mind set them down as those of a suzerain to a protected Power; the trained legal intellect polished away the differences or sharpened the distinctions, but none attempted to reason away the broad, governing fact that Great Britain was invested with a right to veto all treaties made by the Transvaal Government with foreign States. And this circumstance was generally held to place the Boer Republic in a position toward Great Britain which excluded arbitration as effectually as it would have been eliminated had a dispute arisen between France and Madagascar.

Moreover, even had it been otherwise—and later on the matter did appear in a very different light—The Hague Conference could not be confidently appealed to, because the resolutions passed by that assembly had not yet been formally ratified by Great Britain. And thus for a time hostilities between the two peoples assumed the form, not of a war *en règle*, but of a rising in rebellion of quasi-subjects. Color was imparted to this view on the one hand by a certain much-discussed passage in the Speech from the Throne of Her Majesty the Queen, and on the other by the length of time allowed to elapse before the British Government officially notified to the other Powers the fact that war had been declared, and thus implicitly admitted that the Boers were on a footing of complete equality as belligerents. This recognition ruined the legal argument against arbitration. And the ratification of the resolutions of The Hague Conference which has followed since then, has destroyed the plea of inopportunity. Now, therefore, the time has come to appeal to the people of England to advance one step further in the direction of political morality. It is an interesting fact that the material interests of a people run parallel with the lines of its moral obligations; but it very seldom happens that the connection between the two is quite so visible as in the present case. England cannot compass her aims

by means of arms. War was always a clumsy, expensive and cruel means of trying issues between States and peoples. But heretofore it has been, at least generally, an efficient means of cutting, if not undoing, many a Gordian knot. At present, it has ceased to be even this, and it has become merely the embodiment of cruelty of the worst kind—a cruelty which is bereft of such redeeming features as finality could impart. The result of wars can no longer be decisive, because the defense, however numerically weak, will enjoy such an initial advantage over the attack as to be practically equal to it. Therefore, the belligerents can bleed each other *à blanc*, to the very verge of complete collapse, but neither will be able to crush the other and itself escape without vital hurt. This fact, and I venture to think that I have proved it to be the main fact in all future wars, causes the line of England's moral duty visibly to coincide with that of her material interests. I say nothing now of the future necessity of the two races living side by side in South Africa on the principle of "give and take." I pass over in silence the powerful argument against the war which the comparative statistics of births and deaths in the Transvaal supply, whence it appears that the future is to the more prolific race of the Boers. I rely solely on the fact that, weak as the Boers are numerically, they are enabled by the most modern weapons to hold their own while defending their country against invasion, and they will do so with such results as to render the entire upshot of the war utterly indecisive. If that be true, do not the material interests of England, no less than the ethical mission which Great Britain is accomplishing in the world, point to the necessity of sheathing the sword?

From the point of view of traditional politics, the present moment seems, I am well aware, extremely inopportune for an appeal to the people of England to forego the vast advantages which seem to await their army in South Africa, and to turn their thoughts peaceward. But it only seems inopportune. The surrender of General Cronje was undoubtedly a most important triumph in itself, and it also contained the promise of the very best throughout the war that British strategy can effect. But the very best that strategy, British or foreign, can accomplish in guerilla warfare is relatively very little indeed, and it was attained when the British forces entered Bloemfontein. That success was the high-water mark of the spring tide. But from the moment

the invasion of the Transvaal proper begins, and European troops venture into the heart of the South African Switzerland, every hill and hollow of which may be transformed into an impregnable fortress, the fortune of war will necessarily change once more, and the gloomy outlook of last December and January will dash high hopes and evoke dread fears anew. This is not prophecy but logic; not clairvoyance but insight. Smokeless powder, quick-firing rifles and artillery, and the scientific construction of entrenchments can be utilized by a clever people to such purpose that a determined force of defenders may successfully hold its own against an invading army eight times larger than itself.

But in the Transvaal the conditions will be exceptionally favorable to the Boers and correspondingly adverse to the British, who will forfeit even such advantages as superior artillery, tactical training and iron discipline have heretofore conferred upon them. The country is barren, and supplies must therefore be drawn from the distant base, with which a very long line of communications must be continuously kept open. The land is further rugged, hilly, abounding in narrow passes like those of Spain, Caucasus, Bosnia, the Island of Crete, which were for a long time successfully defended against armies of many thousands, most of whom now lie buried in the soil they invaded. Even if the Boers lacked the inborn shrewdness which characterizes all their military and political movements, necessity alone would compel them to break up their forces into a number of little bands, whose aim and object it would be to harass the British rear, cut off supplies and above all seriously damage the railway line or lines on which the invading army must mainly rely. Now, these objects would not be difficult of accomplishment. It needs so little in these days of destructive explosives to blow up a bridge, a station, a tunnel, and to cause an obstruction in a few minutes which cannot be repaired in less than a month! And there will be but one available railway line from base to front, so that if that can be rendered impassable, the termination of the war will have been put off indefinitely and time will have been enlisted on the side of the defenders, and time exposes England to the danger of foreign complications.

I wish it to be clearly understood that I do not for a moment suppose that the Boers will dispute every mile of territory. On the contrary, they will imitate the Russians in 1812 and retire before the invader for a time. But, as their guerilla warfare is

scientific, they will do what the Russians never did, and they will do it under favorable conditions which the subjects of Alexander I. never enjoyed. Besides the constant attacks on the rear and the frequent attempts to cut the long line of communications, which will force the British troops to split up into small parties, the Boers will judiciously choose a small number of positions on the line of the British advance, which, strong by nature, may be rendered impregnable by art. These they will fortify with all the elaborate efficiency guaranteed by modern military science. In the neighborhood they will store up the needful supplies of provisions and ammunition, and then they will calmly await the arrival of the enemy. If the Boers pitch upon one or two such strong positions in the fastnesses of the Transvaal at places which the enemy cannot possibly turn, the problem of successful defense is solved. No mere advantage in numbers such as Great Britain could secure would equalize the chances of the belligerents, and the invading army, or as much of it as survived, would find itself in a no-thoroughfare.

To many readers this forecast will seem too darkly colored to represent the probabilities of the case with fidelity. But the ordinary civilian who has never given his attention to military matters is necessarily incapable of gauging accurately the radical revolution effected in warfare by the improved weapons of to-day, and him I can only refer to my work on "The Future of War," in which all the problems of warfare in their contemporary forms are clearly formulated and exhaustively discussed. Among specialists, too, who have a right to be listened to with respect, there are some who think that my sketch of the difficulties in the way of the British army in South Africa is overdrawn. My reply to them is as follows: The *data* on which I base my judgment are facts admitted by all military experts. They are the only constant, unchanging factors of the problem, wherefore I take them, and them only, into account. In concrete warfare there are, I admit, other factors, which can never be foreseen beforehand because they are mainly accidental. These one can never allow for. Thus it is always possible that political considerations may cause a military plan of campaign to be modified or even seriously changed to the disadvantage of the belligerent altering it. This happened at the very beginning of the war, when General Buller planned the relief of Ladysmith instead of invading the Orange

Free State, and it may happen on the other side if the Boers shape their defense less in harmony with military needs and advantages than in conformity with the desire of their allies, the Orange Staters, whose motives may be wholly political. Any one of these new factors may render the most careful calculations meaningless, just as a magnetic storm may make the most accurate chronometer untrustworthy. But, in both cases, the disturbance is of a merely transitory nature, and the theory remains unaffected. It is absolutely true that the Boers can render the invasion of their country abortive.

But, over and above considerations of a material order, there are moral duties and obligations which the British race cannot afford to shirk. The vast British Empire may be aptly described as a political fabric cemented by morality, instead of being held together by the fear of fire and sword. And this marvellous creation can be maintained in the present only by the means by which it was built up in the past. The white races under the sway of the Queen are all free. If they are subjects of Her Majesty, instead of being citizens of the United States or members of a republic of their own, the reason is that this is their own will. The element of force, of coercion, is wholly absent. Is it wise, at the outset of the twentieth century, to return to the specious maxims which wrought such dire disaster when George the Third was King? I am well aware that there is another way of putting the case, and that this other formula is much more flattering to the self-love of the English people, whose enthusiasm can always be evoked by the assurance that they are fighting for equal rights. But I prefer to pay them the compliment of frank speech and undiluted truth; and I again ask, Is it wise, even politically, to drive unwilling subjects into the political penfold at the point of the sword and to create an Ireland in South Africa?

Could anything half so calamitous occur, if England, referring the issues at stake to a Court of Arbitration, were to undertake to abide by its award? Most assuredly not—not even on the supposition that the *status quo ante* were proclaimed. For even then these two propositions would be absolutely true. In South Africa, as in every other part of the globe, the higher of two competing types of civilization must inevitably oust or absorb the lower, and in this case the pastoral phasis, represented by the Boers, would necessarily and speedily disappear before the industrial imported

by the British. The second certainty is that in South Africa the hegemony will ultimately belong to that one of the two races which proves the most prolific. And this race is the Dutch. Whether the Transvaal be conquered or peace be concluded on the *status quo ante*, those two unalterable facts will have to be reckoned with, and one of these tells in favor of the British, while the other weighs on the side of the Boers.

Nor should we forget the moral effect, as widespread as it would be intense, which the peaceful solution of the struggle, even at this stage, would produce upon the world at large and the Boers in particular. It would be the death knell of Chauvinism throughout the globe and of many of the worst social evils engendered by Chauvinism and its allies—militarism, the “rage of numbers” and the lavishing of labor and money on unproductive undertakings, which, in times of peace as in times of war, constitute the most effectual barriers ever yet raised against the advance of civilization. England would command and receive the moral support of all true friends of peace and civilization throughout the world, which, little though it may seem from a material point of view, is one of those national *imponderabilia* which no people can afford to make light of. The two races could then live in peace and friendship side by side, and the Anglo-Saxon element might fully rely upon the most favorable conditions for deploying those splendid advantages in the peaceful competition for supremacy which a higher civilization, broader humanitarian views and a secular political education have bestowed.

In conclusion I would venture to direct public attention to the beneficent results which the downfall of militarism, thus inaugurated by Great Britain, would unquestionably produce in the social order of things. The nineteenth century has accomplished as much for the well-being of the masses as science effected for the mere mechanism of human comfort. It has brought forth societies for the care of the blind, for the treatment of incurables, the succor of the poor and the sick, the relief of indigent old age, the education of the young and innocent, the improvement of the depraved, the housing and healing of the insane, the curing of the habitual drunkard, the defense of the poor and the helpless—in a word, there is no domain of life in which public and private enterprise has not set itself to work with excellent effect. The result is the gradual levelling upward of the masses. But what

has heretofore been accomplished in this respect is but a raindrop to the ocean, when compared with what still remains to be done by the civilizing influences now at work.

But all those beneficent influences are paralyzed by want of the funds necessary to carry on the good work. And the funds are lacking because of the untold sums of money absorbed every year by militarism, which, like some mythical monster, lives and thrives on the life-blood of the masses. Now I ask, Is it really better to spend these millions of millions upon expedients for the speedy massacre *en masse* of men who only want to live and work for themselves and their families, than to invest them in humanizing the wild beasts of the social penfold, in relieving human sufferings and making mankind more amenable to the subtle influences of morality and art? Socialistic reformers who desire to see the taxes used in thus benefiting the entire community have been frequently scoffed at as Utopians. But which is the more fantastic scheme of the two—the spending of the money for the improvement of the masses, or its investment in the purchase of arms and ammunition for annihilating them?

Questions like these cannot be long hidden from the common people, nor until they have been rightly solved can socialistic agitation of a disquieting character be entirely suppressed. If such agitation is less to be feared in England than elsewhere, it is because heretofore England has adopted a line of action opposed to militarism and free from most of its characteristic evils. To continue the war will be to retrace her steps and follow in the wake of the military Powers of the Continent. And the attempt to maintain a great land army and the most powerful fleet in the world will bring forth curious effects not dreamt of in the philosophy of Jingoism.

Look at the question from any and every point of view, the conclusion is forced upon the unbiased outsider that England has everything to gain and nothing to lose by silencing the war trumpets and submitting the dispute to arbitration. Material interests, political prestige and moral obligations all point to one and the same line of action.

JEAN DE BLOCH.